

Samuel L. and Lettie McCarthy House  
(Gilden Barton Funeral Home)  
1329 8th Avenue  
Fourth Ward Neighborhood  
Altoona  
Blair County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5859

HABS  
PA,  
7-ALTO,  
65-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SAMUEL L. AND LETTIE MCCARTHY HOUSE  
(Gilden Barton Funeral Home)

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Location: 1329 8th Avenue

Date of Erection: 1888

Description: This substantial brick-veneered and mansard-roofed house on an 8th Avenue corner lot was originally built as a doctor's residence and office. The vertical lines of the three-story structure with its long, close-set windows are further emphasized by two three-story hexagonal towers with faceted caps rising at both southern corners of the house.

The lower curve of the mansard projects above alternating large and small brackets, running along the cornice of a two-story, gabled rear addition as well. This has the effect, along with the flat roof of a one-story porch, of visually dividing the structure by floor. Decorative stone banding with impressed flower motifs runs between floors on the tower exterior. The upper mansard section is tiled in slate, has a uniform bracketed cornice and pedimented dormers with round-arched windows.

The house is a substantial four to five bays wide (three plus the tower) with a central entrance. A low, one-story brick garage has been attached to the rear of the structure.

Except for its placement on a corner lot, this house is similar to another Altoona dwelling, located at 1409 13th St., on the west side of the city. While the McCarthy house has been painted, this other example has not, so that the original red brick and dark stone trim are discernible.

History: The McCarthy House, in its showy grandeur, exemplifies the use of architecture to accord individual prominence and status. The present house was built in 1888 on the site of an older frame dwelling by a newly arrived Altoona resident. Clark's 1888 Altoona city directory lists Samuel L. McCarthy, "physician, lately from Huntingdon Co., office and residence now building at cor[n]er of Eighth ave and Fourteenth St. o h do [owns bome ditto]."

Tax records show that in 1888 Dr. A. F. McCarthy was a nonresident owning a corner lot, house, and stable at 1331 8th Ave. worth \$800. In 1889, however, he had a large brick house worth \$6,000, a lot with double house worth \$1,000, and a livery stable all at this same 1331 8th Ave. address. The following year he was also taxed for a horse. The new house was apparently thought to be outstanding, as it is pictured in Illustrated Altoona, a promotional volume dating from 1896.

The current phase of the structure's history as the Gilden Barton Funeral Home began when Otto Gilden purchased the front 50' x 83' property and current house in July 1923 for \$18,000. By 1925, he was listed in directories as a funeral director and embalmer at 1329-31 8th Ave., living at the same address. By 1930, Harry L. Barton was an embalmer working for Gilden. In 1931 title to the property was transferred to the Bartons. As of 1939, Gilden and Barton had formed Altoona Casket & Burial Case Company, with an address on Pleasant Valley Boulevard, where Barton and his wife Ruth resided. Gilden continued to live at the 8th Avenue address, still called Gilden's Funeral Home and Supply Company at that time.

Since 1940, title to the property has passed among various intermarried members of the Gilden and Barton families. The property is currently used as a residence and mortuary.

Sources: Maps: 1888, 1894. Deed books: V/162, V/488, 41/32, 67/673, 624/54, 61/636, 309/314, 403/181. City directories. Tax assessment records. Illustrated Altoona, 7.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The

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project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. Overviews of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and the fourth ward neighborhood (HABS No. PA-5786) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Susan Garfinkel in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of HABS senior historian Alison K. Hoagland and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Garfinkel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.